# New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1949

Volume X, Number 21 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of October 10, 1949


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NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK SUN


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# "Yes, M'Lord"

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 5, 1949

## Matthew's Terrific In 'Yes, M'Lord'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

If the evening offered nothing but the performance of A. E. Matthews, "Yes, M'Lord" would be memorable. This is such rich acting that one constantly wonders just how the gentleman seems to do so little and accomplish so much.

As the Earl of Lister, Matthews plays a role that is more a theme than a participating character. He seems to take no real part in the slender plot, which is used to illustrate attitudes, yet if it did not happen in his house and presence, it would be a poor thing indeed.

The satire emanates from the British Labor party victory in 1945, and proceeds on the assumption that the mellowed aristocracy will undergo next to no philosophical or spiritual change whatever, regardless of which party happens to be in power. This class is above shabbiness and casually resourceful about an outwardly new way of living, but it is the working class which is most demanding about the preservation of traditional manner.

**Son Defeated.**

What story there is relates the defeat of Lord Lister's son, running as a Conservative. When his Laborite opponent is elevated to the peerage because the government needs more Ministers there, the young nobleman runs on the Labor ticket, and this time is defeated by his father's butler, who has assumed his former Conservative mantle.

It might seem natural for a father to take interest in his son's so active career, particularly when its ramifications take place directly under his nose. But Lister is much more absorbed in popping off rabbits with his shotgun, or grumbling about undercooked sausage.

He is at his supreme best explaining in highly domestic terms how incredibly long is the large intestine.

Obviously this is a very, very British play, but even the political references are rarely too devious for comfort, and attentive listening is not only rewarding, but also no effort, because the play progresses at an amiably casual rate.

**Tantalizing Aloofness.**

"Yes, M'Lord" is neither the sort of play which throws itself at you nor the sort that reaches for you. And it is tantalizing for the aloofness which preserves its authentic spirit.

Its humor for an American audience may lie in its sarcasm, its sardonic exasperation with immutability. Yet it is safe to guess that more British audiences found it amusing because they knew it was true.

The casting is excellent. George Curzon as the butler balances on a hairline between respect and familiarity, scarce with reprimand, but pantomimically opinionated. Mary Hinton and Gladys Boot depict assurance and breeding expertly, and Tom Macauley has delicious moments as the new Lord.

As an American girl, there largely for explanations to be made to, Elaine Stritch manages to be bluff and engaging, never too hearty for comeliness.

**"YES, M'LORD"**

Comedy by W. Douglas Home; staged by Colin Chandler; settings and costumes by Edward Gilbert; presented by Lee and J. J. Shubert and Linnit and Dunfee, Ltd., by arrangement with John Krimsky at the Booth Theatre, October 4, 1949. The cast:

The Earl of Lister.....A. E. Matthews
The Countess of Lister...Mary Hinton
June Farrell.....Elaine Stritch
Beasie.....Diane Hart
Beecham.....George Curzon
Lord Pym.....Hugh Kelly
Lady Caroline Smith..Gladys Boot
Mr. Cleghorn....Tom Macaulay

**Synopsis:** The action takes place in a sitting-room at The Earl of Lister's castle in England. Act I, Scene 1. The day after the General Elections, Summer, 1945. Scene 2. The following morning. Act II, Scene 1. Saturday evening of the following weekend. After dinner. Scene 2. The by-election. Morning of Nomination Day. Act III, Scene 1. Lunch time, two weeks later. The by-election day. Scene 2. The same evening after dinner.

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**New York Post**
**HOME NEWS**

OCTOBER 5, 1949

## *The British Smile At Social Change*

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

The current social revolution in England is gayly contemplated in a bright, good-humored and quietly hilarious comedy from London, which opened at the Booth Theatre last night. There is no "propaganda," indignation nor editorializing in this "Yes, M'Lord," known during its long British run as "The Chiltern Hundreds," the work of a playwright named W. Douglas Home. Mr. Home neither looks with alarm nor points with pride. But his vastly likeable if somewhat slight play offers, in its debonair fashion, not only a pleasant evening of entertainment but a lot of wisdom about recent historic events.

Writing a few days ago about A. E. Matthews, the 80-year-old British actor who returns to America in the central role after a long absence, I predicted that the perennial Mr. Matthews wouldn't look within two decades of his age. I wouldn't have been exaggerating if I had said three decades. Seeming unchanged from the days when he was one of the most popular of our leading men, the brilliant veteran offers an enchantingly humorous portrait of the Earl of Lister, who imperturbably watches the coming of social change and goes happily about his hunting and gardening, as undisturbed as ever.

**Untroubled Earl**

The easygoing, nonchalant and untroubled Earl represents the spirit of the play as he blandly receives the fact that his son is standing for Parliament as a Laborite, his butler is opposing the boy as the Conservative candidate, the maid is apparently coming into his home as his son's bride and one of his guests is a Socialist leader who, in a campaign speech, has labeled him "a parasite." Watching the easygoing Peer as he surveys the state of the nation from his ancestral castle, you not only have a lot of fun but understand a good deal about the way England quietly accepts a social upset that might mean violence in less sensible lands.

The author has one particularly sly and rather devastating point to make in his comedy. The one person in the play who is bitter, outraged and violent about the peaceful revolution that is taking place is an American, a brisk young woman employed at the U. S. Embassy. The shocked indignation with which the representative of our democracy regards the new state of things, contrasted with the placid manner in which the change is received by the British Peers and Tories, is both biting humor and incisive comment. "Yes, M'Lord" is not a pro-Labor play. Indeed its sympathies are on the other side. The point is its good humor about it all.

**No Pretense**

The new importation from London is not a sturdy or distinguished work. It is inclined to be ramshackle in its structure, slender in its narrative, and occasionally lethargic in its movement. The manner in which its couples are paired off in the end is almost musical-comedy in its patness. It never pretends to be serious or important in its comment. What makes it, despite its slimness, so engaging a comedy is its intelligently humorous and unembittered attitude toward a social upturn that it doesn't quite like, and its slightly rueful but always tolerant laughter.

Mr. Matthews, as I have suggested, provides as delightful a performance as we are likely to see all season. The other English players are excellent, particularly George Curzon as the Tory butler, Hugh Kelly as the son, and Tom Macauley as the Labor cabinet minister. There is also good work by Mary Hinton, Diane Hart and Gladys Boot. Elaine Stritch, as the American girl, is believable but a little too hearty in manner. Hers is the only part I can imagine being better played. "Yes, M'Lord" is a welcome import, the first good, intelligent fun of the season.

Journal and American

OCTOBER 5, 1949

# A. E. Matthews Shines, The Play Runs Down

By ROBERT GARLAND

With its curtain brushed, its woodwork polished and its aisles parted in the middle, the Booth now houses an importation out of England with A. E. Matthews at its head. Known to Londoners as "The Chiltern Hundreds," we Americans get it as "Yes, M'Lord."

By any other name, it would be just as slimmish and Albionian. England, circa 1945, is of course, in upheaval. Yet, in the person of Mr. Matthews, The Earl of Lister carries on like crazy in his old ancestral castle at, say, Cheerio on Lend-Lease, Nerts.

**Because of Mr. Matthews, "Yes, M'Lord" is amusing. Nobody in the English-speaking theatre can pick up a line and throw it away as effectively as he. Thanks to Douglas Home, the playwright, there're many lines for his picking and throwing.**

Yet, in spite of A. E. Matthews, the importation gets slimmer, more Albionian, as the evening wanes. And more oddly insular! It's like asking West End Londoners to enjoy a play dealing in detail with local politics in Westchester County.

Where I'm concerned, "Yes, M'Lord" is A. E. Matthews and A. E. Matthews is "Yes, M'Lord."

• • •

## Wins Applause

I see by the papers that "Yes, M'Lord" concerns a titled Britisher who "remains unperturbed at changing conditions, shoots game from his sitting-room windows, entertains a Labor minister, accepts an invitation from his butler to a holiday in Scotland and"—

**Which should give you a clear enough idea as to what, in the course of three acts and six scenes, His Unperturbed Lordship of A. E. Matthews is up to. At not too long last, the Earl and the actor stand as a Conservative against their son.**

And in a "by-election!" Lord Pym, the son, is engaged to both June Farrell, an American who arrived on the weekend broom, and an upstairs maid called Bessie. Taking him at his hair-do, I don't believe Lord Lister's boy is really interested in either.

What's more, I've forgotten which gets him. But I do remember that Mr. Matthews isn't onstage when "Yes, M'Lord" is finished, although you hear his wonderful high-comedy voice calling from beyond the sitting-room supplied by Edward Gilbert . . .

**But he is back and bowing when a definitely pro-A. E. Matthews audience applauds his welcome presence.**

• • •

## Hart Is Admirable

Co-starred with A. E. Matthews are Mary Hinton and George Curzon. Miss Hinton is making her American debut as Mr. Matthews' not too bright on-stage wife, The Countess of Lister. She does what she has to do with genuine charm and fortitude.

Mr. Curzon's no stranger to these parts. Now, as Beecham, Mr. Matthew's Tory of a butler, he contributes a keen, satiric characterization to the comedy-across-the-sea occasion. But there's not quite enough material to go around.

**Of the young folk, Diane Hart as Bessie the upstairs maid is the most admirable. But she, too, is let-down by the playwright. As for Elaine Stritch, as the American broom-rider and Hugh Kelly, as Lord Lister's son, they don't act up to their coiffures.**

There was many a laugh last night beside the Shubert Alley. A goodly number of them were mine. But let me confess that I'm an ardent A. E. Matthews fan and cherish him as the greatest living pick-up-a-line-and-throw-it-away comedian . . .

**If "Yes, M'Lord" repeats its London run here in New York, I'll be surprised and happy.**

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DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 5, 1949

# Matthews, Curzon Very Funny in Slow-Going Comedy, 'Yes, M'Lord'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

W. Douglas Home's comedy, "Yes, M'Lord," is about as British a British comedy as a British comedy can get. Having been imported by the Brothers Shubert, it lolled and puttered around the Booth Theatre last evening, dropping syllables in clusters, smoking its pipe, helping itself to breakfast out of silver chafing dishes and taking its impertubable time about doing things.

It brought back to us an extraordinary — pardon, extrordnry — comedian, A. E. Matthews, in the role of an absent-minded earl. It offered a splendid P. G. Wodehouse butler in George Curzon — the best butler we've had on the stage since Leo G. Carroll played Trump in "The Green Bay Tree." It had an engaging cast throughout, including the lone American, Elaine Stritch, who sang "Civilization" two seasons ago in "Angel in the Wings" and who has since become a capable young leading woman.

### Sly, Dry Humor.

"Yes, M'Lord" offers a great deal of sly, dry humor, and I wish I could predict for it a New York run to match its run of a year and a half in London. But I can't, because the tempo of this comedy will not match the high-gear speed of the American audience. It is one of those nice things which are good for warm, affectionate chuckles—and this fashion in comedy seems to have passed in our local civilization, where we demand efficiency and hard, bright polish in our plays as well as our plumbing.

"Yes, M'Lord" performed in London under the title of "The Chiltern Hundreds," a term involving the mechanics of British politics which is as obscure to us as British politics itself, or themselves. And scarcely more exciting. There is quite a bit of stuff about standing for Parliament and by-elections and Tories and Liberals which is not exactly fascinating over here—but a useful framework for some first-rate characterizations and amusing lines.

There is this Earl of Lister, who is stuck with an immense estate and a castle with only a maid and a butler for help. The Countess of Lister does a lot of the housework and he fusses mostly about rabbits and foxes getting into his garden.

### Resists American Push.

There is his son, who is making a lackadaisical debut in politics and who is wearied by the energy of his rich American fiancee. There are the maid and enough other characters to fill one room of the castle. But in the main the fun derives from Mr. Matthews' slowly and perfectly timed delivery and Mr. Curzon's superior buttling. Matthews is vague and vacant, throwing away or mumbling whole paragraphs of script until he comes to something funny — and then letting go with it very briskly. Curzon is a master of the polite sneer and the perfectly turned phrase. It is no surprise when he runs against young Lord Pim and beats him to a seat in the House of Commons.

I had a pleasant enough time last evening after I'd relaxed and given up trying to understand every word our British guests were saying. After all, in one early moment of the play, Mr. Matthews confessed that he didn't understand all he was saying, either. Mary Hinton, Diane Hart and the others of the company are well chosen for their roles—but then the British have always been famed for their ability to act British.

P. S. The Booth Theatre is fine for relaxing now. Fine new decorations, comfortable new seats and a new center aisle.

**New York Herald Tribune**

OCTOBER 5, 1949

**By HOWARD BARNES**

*A Vote for Matthews*

A. E. MATTHEWS has returned triumphantly to the New York stage in a very British comedy of manners and politics, currently known at the Booth as "Yes M'Lord." The veteran actor has lost none of his skill, timing and artistry in the decade or more since he was last seen here. He keeps the W. Douglas Home play, known as "The Chiltern Hundreds" in London, buoyant and engaging on every occasion that he holds the center of the stage. The comedy is highly specialized, dealing as it does with class distinctions, by-elections, the Labor government and local customs. It has a flimsy construction. But Matthews translates more of its laughter for local audiences than one would have imagined possible.

* * *

To be sure he has wonderful support from George Curzon, as an extremely Tory butler who runs for Parliament; from Mary Hinton and the other members of the cast. But it is his characterization of an impoverished and imperturbable earl which gives "Yes M'Lord" its measure of amusement. Whether he is shooting rabbits from the French windows of his ancestral castle, or accepting a somewhat specious farcical mix-up which finds his son standing for a by-election as a Laborite, he is immense. His bits of business supplement the lines splendidly, even when these are none too sprightly. He creates a full-length portrait with plenty of depth. The play might have supported him more solidly, but it is good to have him acting in these parts again.

* * *

Home has examined the social upsets in England which were underlined by the General Elections in 1945. He has done so with tongue in cheek. With the straight-thinking old Earl of Lister as his focal point, he has introduced the reactionary butler and an equally reactionary American girl, a Labor party member who accepts a seat in the House of Lords, a young nobleman who changes parties, and a chamber maid, who wants only to be a maid again after being proposed to by the earl's son. He has arranged these somewhat stock characters in a series of pat situations, which never leave much question as to the outcome of the piece. It is surface writing, which leans far too heavily on localized allusions for comfort.

* * *

That Matthews has succeeded in contributing a vein of profundity to the proceedings is a tour-de-force. His rather bemused tilts with Curzon are always in the right key. The latter is superb as the servitor who wants to uphold an aristocratic tradition of which he is proud and Miss Hinton is fine as the Countess of Lister, who cooks and dusts in the castle. Elaine Stritch plays the American girl a bit broadly at the start but she is good in the climax. Meanwhile Hugh Kelly, as Lord Pym, Diane Hart, as the maid and Tom Macauley as the laborite are all fine. "Yes M'Lord" is thin and jolly British, don't you know, but it has Matthews.

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**The New York Times**

OCTOBER 5, 1949

**AT THE THEATRE**

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Now let's not have any bad feeling between nations or any of that sort of rot. But the fact seems to be that London has sent us a trifling comedy that probably seems even more trifling in New York. It is W. Douglas Home's "Yes, M' Lord," which was put on at the refurbished Booth last evening. In London it was known as "The Chiltern Hundreds," a title that has been rejected as meaningless to any American who did not take Gov. 1 in college.

Mr. Home's scribbled escapade has one virtue. It has brought back to New York A. E. Matthews, who has been out off for eleven years. Mr. Matthews professes to be about eighty years of age now and, of course, he is the best judge of that. But he is sassier than he was the last time we saw him. He has put on a little weight, which is becoming, and now and then verges on the reckless in his deportment.

According to Mr. Home's whim, he is cast as the Earl of Lister, who imperturbably carries on with his rabbit-and-fox shooting while the Labor party wins the election and revolutionizes England. Mr. Matthews is the master of insouciance. In a long career as an actor he never has raised his voice above an ironic growl and has never made a wide gesture. Within this narrow area he is enormously skillful. The growls set the audience to laughing, and a raised eyebrow is as hilarious as a clown's kick-in-the-pants.

In his time Mr. Matthews has had to work with some pretty scanty materials. Although they have seldom been more microscopic than on the present occasion, he manages somehow to make them look witty and to make the life of the decayed aristocrat look very wise, droll and enviable, indeed. He deserves to be on the Tory payroll as Exhibit A in affable public relations.

Mr. Home has a very promising subject for a topical satiric comedy. With the assistance of a little useful hocus-pocus, he contrives a situation in which a very grave butler becomes the Conservative candidate for Parliament in opposition to his master's son, who is the Labor party's candidate. Mix this up with an amused sketch of the gentle and unresisting collapse of the aristocratic way of life, include a poke or two at the bumptiousness of a Labor politician and take a crack at the brassy assurance of a rich American girl, and you ought to have a civilized comedy in the high tradition of Wilde and Maugham.

But Mr. Home does not have half as much energy as Mr. Matthews. He has hardly taken the trouble to write anything brisker than a languid parlor charade. In addition to Mr. Matthews, the cast includes George Curzon who is a very superior person as the grand butler and plays with a very neat humor. This is excellent acting right out of Mr. Matthews' upper-class bailiwick. Mary Hinton plays a bustling countess with impeccable sense, wit and good nature.

But even with Mr. Matthews presiding with stylish assurance over the escapade, someone has to do some work on a comedy offered in a public theatre. Mr. Home has not done much work on the writing, nor has Colin Chandler done much on the direction. Mr. Matthews never has had to work in his life, but he is one man in a million and he has made a high art of not working.

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**Daily Mirror**

OCTOBER 5, 1949

## *Matthews Wins Applause In 'Yes, M' Lord'*

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Ponce de Leon sought the fountain of youth in vain, but A. E. Matthews found it. After an absence of 11 years from the American stage, the beloved "Matty" returned to us last evening in "Yes, M'Lord" at the Booth Theatre. Though his press agent claims he's 80, he doesn't appear to have aged a bit since the days when he was one of our great leading men.

"Yes, M'Lord" is a slight, unpretentious little comedy by W. Douglas Home. It has to do with an ingratiating but ineffectual English peer who has a less ingratiating but equally ineffectual son. With the advent of the Labor Party to power, the amiable aristocrat finds himself attempting to keep up appearances and perform his hereditary duties in an ancestral castle manned by but two servants.

His wife hopes to restore the family fortunes somewhat through a marriage of their heir to a rich American girl. The girl demands that he get a job. Which he tries to do by standing for Parliament on the Labor ticket. This shocks the household to such an extent that the butler, with old-school-tie instincts, runs against him as a Conservative and wins.

The comedy is at its best when gently satiric and at its worst when it jumbles a few romances before reaching what is known as a happy ending. It is at its best when Matthews and George Curzon, another welcome returnee to the States, hold the stage and the fort. It is not so hot when the rest of a willing cast struggle with the duller passages.

Matthews is magnificent at underplaying, at knowing when to wham over a line and when to toss one away. He makes vacuity seem immensely charming and almost important. Curzon, a gentleman in real life, with many outstanding performances to his credit in plays ranging from farce to tragedy, is a superlative butler. Mary Hinton, Elaine Stritch, Diane Hart, Gladys Boot, Tom Macaulay and Hugh Kelly are able foils. Incidentally, at first glance you might mistake Kelly for the Duke of Windsor.

Lee and J. J. Shubert, in association with Linnit and Dunfee, Ltd., have given the commentary on Labor England a handsome production.

"Yes, M'Lord" ran for 18 months in London. Its gibes at local politics, austerity and financial difficulties must have appealed to British playgoers, but some of these phenomena may prove baffling to American audiences. As baffling, say as "Life With Father" proved with British audiences.

Again we salute Matthews and Curzon for their virtuosity, which gave the first-nighters some robust laughs and won enthusiastic applause. They are so excellent that we can only wish they had come back to us in a play really worthy of their talents. "Yes, M'Lord" has much to recommend it, thanks to them, but not sufficient.

The Sun

OCTOBER 5, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE

***Good Cast, Placid Comedy.***

The Broadway theater drew upon London's West End last night for "Yes, M'Lord," a black and placid comedy, gabby and leisurely, which is so well played by an attractive English cast it provides a rather entertaining evening in a playhouse. The Booth, all tricked up with new seats and carpeting, now shelters W. Douglas Home's little play.

The principal service rendered by "Yes, M'Lord" is that of returning to our grateful shores that fine actor, A. E. Matthews, one of the bulwarks of his profession for sixty years or so. He is back in the role of a crochety, absent-minded Lord, a preoccupied aristocrat, who is far more interested in taking shots at incautious rabbits through the French doors of his ancestral castle than in the raging political battle between Labor and the Conservatives. Matthews is sure and expert in his playing—curt and deft with his clipped speech, a master of timing, and it's wonderful to have him around again.

"Yes, M'Lord," which goes its way ever so ramblingly, presents a study of the family life of the aristocrats, thrown into conflict with the Labor party. Lord Lister's son has been defeated in the General Elections on the Conservative ticket, so he joins Labor and seems sure of winning his seat in Parliament when he finds himself opposed by the family butler, who has gone Conservative. All of that is managed by an aggressive young woman from the States, who gets herself quite worked up. Life had flowed along pleasantly at the Earl of Lister's until his son's financee moved in and took charge.

"Yes, M'Lord," brought to a pat conclusion, is helped along immeasureably by the acting of A. E. Matthews, by Mary Hinton's easy pleasant performance, and by the first-rate show put on by George Curzon in the role of the butler, who becomes an M. P., only to resign his seat for domestic bliss. Curzon, who appeared in New York in "Parnell" and "Black Limelight," is given to flourishes and to postures and, with his precision of speech, he is thoroughly ingratiating. Hugh Kelly turns in a good performance as the young Lord Pym and there is another from Diane Hart as the confused parlor maid. I found Elaine Stritch, the only American member of the cast, too energetic for comfort.

In "Yes, M'Lord" the actors eat real food, just as actors have been doing in English drawing room comedies since the days of Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones—and they seem to enjoy it. The Booth's new comedy isn't to be taken as an example of superior playwriting, but facile performances make it frequently funny. And in A. E. Matthews it brings back a jolly good actor. If he's really eighty he's quite a jaunty old boy.

# "The Mikado"

Journal American

OCTOBER 6, 1949

## Chartock Version Alive and Clicking

By ROBERT GARLAND

Taking stock in neither the sacredness of the Gilbert and Sullivan collaborations nor the sanctity of the D'Oyly Carte interpretations, S. M. Chartock's American Savoyards at the Mark Hellinger are all right with me.

After they've settled down and pulled themselves together, there's no real reason why their "Mikado" shouldn't be relished by all free-thinking Savoyards. Last night, I enjoyed their wholehearted Gilbert-and-Sullivan-ing.

Against clean, uncluttered backgrounds by Ralph Alswang, in neat Nipponese costumes by Peggy Morrison, Mr. Chartock's singing-players sing and play their way through the music and words of the "Town of Titipu."

And because so meticulous a musician as Lehman Engel occupies the podium, an excellent orchestra gives body and freshness to Sir Arthur's sometimes thin and always familiar music. Mr. Engel has a way with orchestras.

• • •

### Best Liked of All

So, for the millioneth time, Nanki-Poo, Prince of Japan, sings, sighs and woos his wandering way through the two acts of (I quote one Walker McSpadden) the best liked of all operettas (unquote).

If Nanki-Poo has a mild maturity about him, Yum-Yum, girlish as can be, finds no objection to it. So, after 60-odd years of "The Mikado," Titipu Boy again meets Titipu Girl to go through their old routine.

Up on Broadway, this best liked of all operettas proceeds according to precedent. Nothing of note is added, nothing of note is taken away. You relax and Gilbert and Sullivan flows over you like a soothing breeze.

Pooh-Bah still orders the young man to despair. Ko-Ko still has his little list. Yum-Yum is still a little maid from school. Nanki-Poo is still a second trombone. Katisha still bids the revels cease. And they still do!

• • •

### Still Brings Sun

The second act still brings the sun and Yum-Yum. And the Emperor and his court. And the song about the snickersnee. And poor dear titwillow. And the make-believe death of Nanki-Poo. And Nanki-Poo's final winning of his Yum-Yum.

These Sullivan songs, and the Gilbert dialogue between, are respectfully, rather than reverently, dealt with by the American Savoyards. And, in Jean Handzlik's unsparing interpretation Katisha is someone to remember.

Earle MacVeigh, Robert Eckles and Ralph Riggs, keep in the picture as Pish-Tush, Pooh-Bah and Ko-Ko. At the same time, Mr. Riggs, obviously frightened by the ghost of D'Oyly Carte, should exorcise that spectre from his prompt book. Joseph Macaulay is a royal Mikado.

I'm always happier after any Gilbert and Sullivan outfit gets "The Mikado" and "Pinafore" out of its repertoire. But, at the Mark Hellinger, the doings in Titipu are alive and clicking. And without any precious English accent.

"THE MIKADO"

Opera written by W. S. Gilbert; composed by Arthur Sullivan; staged by S. M. Chartock; scenery and lighting by Ralph Alswang; costumes by Peggy Morrison; musical direction by Lehman Engel; presented by Mr. Chartock at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, October 4, 1949. The cast:

Nanki-Poo.....Morton Bowe
Pish-Tush.....Earle MacVeigh
Pooh-Bah.....Robert Eckles
Ko-Ko.....Ralph Riggs
Yum-Yum.....Kathleen Roche
Pitti-Sing.....Beverly Janis
Peep-Bo.....Elaine Malbin
The Mikado of Japan.....
Joseph Macaulay
Katisha.....Jean Handzlik
Go-To.....Craig Timberlake

**New York Post**
**HOME NEWS**
OCTOBER 5, 1949

## 'Mikado' Opens At Mark Hellinger

By VERNON RICE

There is a place for Gilbert and Sullivan at $4.80 top on Broadway and S. M. Chartock is trying to meet that demand with his troupe, which he brought to the Mark Hellinger last night.

If the opening fare, "The Mikado," is a sample product of the producer's proposed repertory season for ever-eager savoyards, however, they can look forward to a period of mediocrity. It will be no bargain. Lacking style and pace and with only a few members of the cast who indicated they had any acting ability, last evening's revival lumbered and dragged, coming to life only at odd and too infrequent intervals.

The true hero of the company seems to be Lehman Engel in the orchestra pit, who instilled in the musicians under his command and in the choral ensembles the precise style missing in the principals.

That precision is absent is not understandable considering that Morton Bowe, who plays Nanki-Poo; Kathleen Roche as Yum-Yum; Ralph Riggs, who has the role of Ko-Ko, and Robert Eckles, playing Pooh-Bah, have been doing Gilbert and Sullivan for a number of years.

Most of the leads can sing but so can a lot of other people. Anyone who has so much as appeared in a glee club version of the operetta knows that it takes more than professional singers to draw Gilbert and Sullivan fans to the theatre.

Only Jean Handzlik, a comparatively new singer, as Katisha, and Joseph Macaulay, in the role of the Mikado, behave as though they had any knowledge of the requirements of a specialized performer. Miss Handzlik has a brilliant contralto voice and Mr. Macaulay brings a welcomed flash to a routine and colorless evening.

This production of "The Mikado" makes the Masque and Lyre group playing weekends at the Jan Hus House with only one piano and on a small stage seem much better than I had originally thought.

And I thought it was pretty fine.

New York World-Telegram
OCTOBER 5, 1949

## Toned-Down Mikado Still Pleases

By LOUIS BIANCOLLI.

Local Savoyards are in clover this week, now that S. M. Chartock's company has moved on to "The Mikado." Last night's audience at the Mark Hellinger Theater returned smile for smile of the endearing score.

Crowning masterpiece of the Gilbert and Sullivan teamwork, "The Mikado" still sounded and looked good. The unfailing charm of melody was there, and the elevated spoofing still brought on torrents of good cheer.

It is just possible some of the spoken dialogue is beginning to show its years, but I suppose it's best to think of those passages as note-less music belonging with the rest of the score. They are a sort of silent Sullivan.

**Rendering Capital.**

Musically, last night's rendering was capital, thanks to director Lehman Engel. Sullivan's wondrously woven fabric received all the respect it deserved, and one felt Mr. Engel was not only a perfect Savoyard but an ace musician as well.

Something of a subdued quality settled on the performance and one welcomed the restraint for a change. Nothing was overplayed; in fact, some of the whimsy was so casual you almost missed it.

Everyone in the cast seemed primed for that mood. The Pooh-Bah was less pompous than usual, Nanki-Poo sang as if he didn't want to disturb anybody who might be dozing, and Ko-Ko was quite the amiable executioner.

Ralph Riggs' version of the Lord High hatchetman was something to watch. He bounced and fluttered about like some weird bird chattering strangely to itself. The comedy was simple and certain—and again subdued.

**Calm, Soothing Performance.**

Morton Bowe gave a calm, soothing quality to Nanki-Poo's lines, and one could understand the Wandering Minstrel's feeling for Yum-Yum, when the little charmer appeared and lived up to her name.

As Yum-Yum Kathleen Roche sang prettily and joined Ko-Ko's other wards in looking like an assortment of vari-colored pastry.

Robert Eckles took the role of Pooh-Bah in weighty stride, without trying to sound too exalted as the Lord High Everything. The gags went better for not being overstressed.

Accolades are also due Earle MacVeigh (Pish-Tush), Elaine Malbin (Peep-Bo), Beverly Janis (Pitti-Sing), Jean Handzlik (Katisha), and Joseph Macaulay (Mikado).

No attempt is being made to raise the roof of the Mark Hellinger Theater these nights. If you like a well-behaved "Mikado"—without harsh clowning—Mr. Chartock's production is a safe bet.

DAILY NEWS
OCTOBER 5, 1949

## 'Mikado' Opens New Gilbert-Sullivan Series

By DOUGLAS WATT

Back in New York after many a season on the road, some veteran Savoyards have been joined by some new enthusiasts and, last night at the Mark Hellinger, they brought us "The Mikado." It was the first in a series of four Gilbert and Sullivan works to be presented a week apart under the sponsorship of S. M. Chartock, and it was a pleasant enough performance.

Ralph Riggs, who plays Ko-Ko, isn't getting any younger, but he has the knack of the role and still skips about the stage in an alarming fashion. Joseph Macaulay is a properly commanding and self-deflating Mikado, and Robert Eckles is as pompous and cheerfully corrupt a Pooh-Bah as you could wish for. The youthful Kathleen Roche is of another generation but she, too, has been pouring out the mannered sighs of Yum-Yum for enough years so that her characterization has a fixed quality of charm.

**They Never Change.**

They bring the present production of "The Mikado" the rigid authority it requires; for, make no mistake about it, Gilbert and Sullivan is not open to interpretation. The words are all out in the open, and the characters have no hidden depths except those tender quantities imposed upon them by the music. These are classic figures.

Morton Bowe is no youth, but his tenor is somewhat better than what we are accustomed to hear in the part of Nanki-Poo, just as Earle MacVeigh's baritone is an especially vigorous adornment to the person of Pish-Tush. The most striking newcomer, however, is Jean Handzlik, who wears the monstrous make-up of Katisha. She must be a handsome girl, without those easily applied lines of age, and she has a fine contralto. Beverly Janis and Elaine Malbin are cute and helpful, too, as the sisters of Yum-Yum.

**An Excellent Orchestra.**

The chorus of gentlemen and ladies of Japan is well-rehearsed, though its group patterns are dull. Ralph Alswang's scenery is simple and attractive and well-lit, though the light-man balled up some of his cues last night. Peggy Morrison's costumes are very bright and very silky and there is a large, and varied collection of fans for the actors to play with.

Praise, too, to the wigs by Lerch, which didn't lurch one bit.

The orchestra sounded like a relatively small one, but I don't believe I've ever heard a better-disciplined one at a G. & S. performance. Lehman Engel, the conductor, is responsible for that.

Chartock, who directed, has done a clean, traditional job of it. At this point, it seems necessary to observe that the present troupe will never put the d'Oyly Carte Co. out of business. It lacks the splendid discipline and comfortable rightness of the English troupe. The main thing, however, is that the dyed-in-the-wool Gilbert and Sullivan fans have a creditable company at hand to stimulate them and that the younger students, who come along every year, have an opportunity to study in performance four of the works of the masters of musical comedy. G. & S. have never been topped in their special domain.

## The New York Times

OCTOBER 5, 1949

### *Return of Gilbert and Sullivan*

With no end of good-will and a cast likewise endowed, S. M. Chartock last night launched at the Mark Hellinger what he hopes will be a permanent Gilbert and Sullivan company.

For the opening bill Mr. Chartock has chosen "The Mikado," and on the evidence at hand it still is a bit early to make any predictions for his dreams. That he needs more time for some looking around, however, cannot be doubted. This "Mikado" has plenty of bounce, energy and gaiety, but what is decidedly lacking seems to be a kind of style and polish, without which the Gilbert and Sullivan mockery falls short of its potential.

One of the assets, too, that "The Mikado" needs is a fine Ko-Ko. The assignment in this case has fallen to Ralph Riggs, and if he invites comparison with the incomparable Martyn Green of the D'Oyly Carte Company it is his own doing. He apparently has seen Mr. Green in action, and Mr. Chartock, who staged the production, has permitted him to ape the master. Mr. Riggs just isn't up to the deftness, the agility and the comic sense possessed by Mr. Green, and the result is very much in line with routine burlesque. This is an irritant not easily erased.

* * *

As for the other players, they are not of even quality. Morton Bowe has the role of Nanki-Poo. He has a pleasant enough tenor voice, but there is a feeling that he is not yet quite at home in the role. More on the credit side are Robert Eckles, a beefy Pooh-Bah; Earle MacVeigh, who as Pish-Tush sings Gilbert's lyrics with clearness and relish, and Kathleen Roche, who makes a dainty Yum-Yum. Miss Roche's voice comes over nicely and she is every bit the innocent little maid from school. Jean Handzlik is a good Katisha, forgiving for the moment a hideous and rather incomprehensible job of make-up, and Joseph Macaulay comes on with zest and vigor in the caricature of the ruler of Japan.

* * *

Lehman Engel has handled the musical direction and has rendered a creditable performance. Under his baton the music is endowed with a nice, spirited quality which contributes much that is worthy in this production. He has gotten the chorus to sing in invigorating tempo and even better, with acceptable clarity of diction. Ralph Alswang's sets are simple and his lighting is bright, and, together with Peggy Morrison's costuming, gives a cheery clearness to the proceedings, even when they tend to bog down.

Altogether, then, Mr. Chartock's "Mikado" adds up unevenly. He understands that Gilbert and Sullivan intended their work to be both a satire of the operettas of the day, as well as a bit of spoofing of the Land of the Rising Sun. He still has to capture the intangible quality, however, that will give it the sparkle and unity it needs.

L. P.

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## NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 5, 1949

### *Gilbert and Sullivan at the Mark Hellinger*

By Otis L. Guernsey Jr.

A program of Gilbert and Sullivan repertory began slowly but perhaps promisingly with last night's "The Mikado" at the Mark Hellinger Theater. This particular operetta is not the easiest of the Savoyard works to put over, and there were stretches when this version of the Japanese dream-world seemed dull and outdated. The S. M. Chartock company has not the magic of voice and timing for a gossamer illusion of young love and comic politics, but it is an attractive, professional group entering with a will into the Gilbert and Sullivan Victorianisms. The first effort may be little better than mediocre, but it is pleasant to have it in town.

* * *

In coping with "The Mikado," Chartock has evidently decided to bolster the humor with an open, forceful style of presentation. This is nowhere better exemplified than in the performance of Ralph Riggs as the Lord High Executioner, a Ko-Ko who tries to make up for imperfect diction with an almost burlesque-comic approach to the role. Since there is little grace in this clowning, it does not work particularly well. Most of the parts are played archly, as though it were the operetta itself being satirized. "The Mikado" may have its weaknesses; but this style does not help to hide them, and, in fact, it actually points them up.

The voices are adequate to the task in hand, though the synchronization of the patter songs is much less than perfect. Morton Bowe and Kathleen Roche play the Wandering Minstrel and his raven-haired, coquettish lover, letting Sullivan's music come over clearly but rarely able to make anything of Gilbert's extremely flimsy characters. Jean Handzlik is a too extremely made-up Katisha, but her contralto voice and hefty performance are combined in one of the company's best jobs. Joseph Macaulay plays the Mikado himself with gusto as he makes the punishment fit the crime in the second act. The all-important chorus is a good one, in a show which has plenty of enthusiasm and may acquire polish.

* * *

Between Robert Eckles, as the huge and pompous Pooh-Bah, and Riggs as Ko-Ko, there is more than enough posturing in the male trios, but they could stand more of the poise and vocal competence of Earle MacVeigh in the third position. The orchestra under Lehman Engel's direction is a good one, though it has trouble filling this large theater, and Ralph Alswang's scenery and costumes are bright and appropriate. What one misses in this performance of "The Mikado" is a certain light-hearted brilliance which presents these airy fancies without disturbing them, the sort of brilliance that creates perfect diction in a seemingly effortless manner. The first of a series of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas is ragged in many places, but there is time for improvement as the Japanese fans flutter on Broadway.

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## The Sun

OCTOBER 6, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE

### *'The Mikado' Without Magic.*

S. M. Chartock is making a brave try with Gilbert & Sullivan at the Mark Hellinger Theater, but I'm wondering, after seeing last night's spiritless performance of "The Mikado," if his company is up to it. I missed the opening night proceedings because of being a few blocks to the south watching A. E. Matthews, George Curzon and some excellent co-workers from London bring life to the comedy called "Yes, M' Lord."

It takes courage, plus a bankroll of sorts, to engage a company, rehearse it, hire a big Broadway playhouse and announce a four-week repertory season. Courage and the talent needed to bring forth the blissful enchantments of the Sullivan melodies and the Gilbertian lyrics. Talent and magic were missing last night. The new company's principals, with two or three exceptions, are weak and the efforts at comedy are doleful. The settings of Ralph Alswang are right enough and bright enough; so are the costumes of Peggy Morrison.

The current production is at its best when the full-throated ensemble is singing and at its worst when some of the leading players are striving to bring some gayety and innocent merriment into the performance. Not all is lost, however. Kathleen Roche sings sweetly and she is an appealing Yum-Yum. Joseph Macaulay, an actor who knows what these Savoy operas are all about, is an impressive and fearsome Mikado and gives a genuine lift to the festivities when he makes his first entrance. Jean Handzlik, in the terrifying get-up that goes with the role of Katisha, is thoroughly capable. And down there in orchestra pit Lehman Engel conducts nobly.

But taking the evening as a whole, and considering the production in total effect, it's a "Mikado" without sprightliness, without buoyancy and comedy values, without style. The late and great Winthrop Ames wouldn't have believed that the town of Titipu and its gentlemen of Japan could have taken such a beating.

I shall withhold comment on the performances of several leading members of Chartock's troupe until they appear next week in "The Pirates of Penzance." Perhaps they will be better. They've got to be.

**Daily Mirror**

OCTOBER 6, 1949

## *Chartock Does Well With New G & S Troupe*

By ROBERT COLEMAN

S. M. Chartock, a veteran hand with Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, is performing a wonderful service for Savoyards by developing a new American company to present the ever-delightful works of the masters. It is currently at the Mark Hellinger Theatre for a limited engagement of four weeks, prior to beginning a coast-to-coast tour.

Chartock opened his season with "The Mikado," for which Ralph Alswang and Peggy Morrison have designed attractive new sets and costumes. Even the D'Oyly Carte company never spent more money, we suspect, on a production. Too long have the local Savoyards been forced to look at storehouse backgrounds and haberdashery. We salute Chartock for taking the rubber band off his bankroll.

Gone from our stage are such Gilbert and Sullivan greats of the past as Frank Moulin, Bill Danforth, Herbert Waterous, Vera Ross, Vivian Hart, Roy Cropper and Howard Marsh, so Chartock has had to start from scratch in building a new troupe. Personally, we think he has made an auspicious start. True, the newcomers to his ranks have something to learn, but they all have had wide experience on the musical stage.

The veterans, Joseph Macaulay and Ralph Riggs, do justice to The Mikado and Ko-Ko. Jean Handzlik, handicapped last evening by a sore throat, appeared to have a first-rate voice for the difficult role of Katisha. Kathleen Roche, Elaine Malbin and Beverly Janis, in addition to having fine voices, have eye appeal. Earl MacVeigh, Robert Eckles, and Morton Bowe render able service.

Young Miss Malbin is the Brooklyn girl who won critical acclaim at the age of 17 in concert. In the past two years she has sung with the San Carlo Opera Company, the St. Louis Municipal Opera Company, the Metropolitan Opera Guild, and had her own radio program on a national network.

Lehman Engel is the musical director. He is not only a distinguished batoneer, but has composed scores for numerous Broadway shows. Chartock, not content with assembling the best available principals for his company, also has corralled one of the best choruses heard hereabouts in a long while.

You may have heard better "Mikados" in your years of theatre going, but there were dozens of top-flight artists to do them. We think Chartock deserves the support of New York's Savoyardery for his courage in launching a new company to present the works of Gilbert and Sullivan.

Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither is a great Gilbert and Sullivan troupe. So we ought to be patient and grateful. Unless Chartock had been willing to take the leap, we should have been without a Gilbert and Sullivan company this season—and perhaps for many seasons to come. And he's only getting a $4.80 top at the Mark Hellinger.

# "Twelfth Night"

**The New York Times**

OCTOBER 4, 1949

## AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Thanks to Will Shakespeare, the season is having a pleasant beginning. "Twelfth Night" has turned up at the Empire in a light and joyous performance. Since it is a performance and not a production, there are no stars in the crown of this patchwork masquerade. But perhaps that is the best way to extract the sweetness of the last deliberate comedy Shakespeare put on paper.

For Frances Reid and Nina Foch give sunny performances in the parts of Viola and Olivia, and catch the enchantment of Shakespeare's invention. As Sir Toby and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Carl Benton Reid and Philip Tonge are drunkenly mischievous. And Arnold Moss is giving us the best Malvolio of our time.

The "Twelfth Night" that Jane Cowl brought us in 1930 was more neatly stitched together than this one, and the lines were more beautifully spoken then. But the performance that Valentine Windt has now brought us from Ann Arbor ranks next for daintiness, charm and good humor.

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Although very little is known about Shakespeare's personality, one quality seems to be common in the few references to him. He was "sweet Will," or "gentle Will," with a gift for entertainment. Not realizing that he was writing for the ages, he took less pains with "Twelfth Night" than, as things have turned out, he should have done. It is an improvised entertainment founded on the traditional device of mistaken identity.

Mr. Windt's production has captured the buoyant spirit of the comedy. It has been put together out of attractive curtains designed by Louis Kennel, a vast expanse of lovely sky, some catches of music and entrancing costumes that also come from Mr. Kennel's drawing board.

* * *

Since "Twelfth Night" includes some of the most rapturous lyric poetry Shakespeare wrote, it is a pity that the performance is not shot through with spoken music. That was the great gift that Miss Cowl brought to it. But there is also an advantage in not casting Viola and Olivia as star parts. It preserves the gay unpretentiousness of Shakespeare's original motive. Miss Reid's petite Viola is both cunning and beguiling, and Miss Foch's Olivia is ravishingly beautiful. They are an ideal combination.

Some of the comedy in the buttery is loose and rambling, for this is a part of the play that needs firmer direction than Mr. Windt has brought to it. Shakespearean clowns are usually sore problems in the modern theatre, and Harry Townes resorts to coyness when Feste's whirligig lines perplex him. Nor does he do much with the exquisite songs that Shakespeare carelessly dropped into that part. Singing them with considerable affectation, he lets the final lines die away into some sort of genteel silence.

* * *

Ruth Enders is lively as Maria, though perhaps not quite dissolute enough. You know that she is only pretending to be a hussy. But if this "Twelfth Night" had nothing else to recommend it, it would still be distinguished for Mr. Moss's fantastic Malvolio. His supercilious posturing as that vain fraud and his command of the lines as character portrayal compose a little masterpiece of broad comedy expression.

Did you ever notice how simple and logical any part becomes when an actor really masters it? Or, how simple and logical the whole play becomes when he has the center of the stage? That is what happens in the current "Twelfth Night" when Mr. Moss gives us Malvolio reading the bogus letter and inflating himself into the role of the great romantic suitor. It is a brilliant moment of acting on the threshold of the new season.

**"TWELFTH NIGHT"**

Play by William Shakespeare; staged by Valentine Windt; setting and costumes by Louis Kennel; presented by Roger Stevens at the Empire Theatre, October 3, 1949. The cast:

Orsino.....Henry Brandon
Curio.....Robert Hartung
Valentine.....Michael Wyler
Viola.....Frances Reid
Sea Capt..Tom Emlyn Williams
1st Sailor.....Winston Ross
2nd Sailor.....Paul Menard
Sir Toby Belch..Carl Benton Reid
Maria.....Ruth Enders
Sir Andrew Aguecheek.....
Philip Tonge
Feste.....Harry Townes
Olivia.....Nina Foch
Malvolio.....Arnold Moss
1st Lady in Waiting.....
Sally Chamberlain
2nd Lady in Waiting..Helen Marcy
Sebastian....William Bromfield
Antonio.....Walter Klavun
Fabian.....Truman Smith
1st Officer.....Winston Ross
2nd Officer.....Paul Menard
A Priest..Tom Emlyn Williams

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 4, 1949

By HOWARD BARNES

*Strives to Please*

A SPIRITED revival of Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" has inaugurated a new theater season at the Empire. Pace and balanced acting are to be found in this Roger Stevens production, which was done at Ann Arbor last spring. If the comedy itself remains forced and fortuitous, that is the fault of the Bard, who wrote it in an off moment. Certainly Frances Reid, as Viola, and such colleagues as Carl Benton Reid, Nina Foch and Arnold Moss do a commendable job of interpretation. And Valentine Windt's direction against simple settings has fluency and considerable flavor. One still wonders why "Twelfth Night" was selected for presentation.

* * *

In the present streamlined version of eighteen scenes with one intermission, all the worst features of the classic are clearly discernible. Mistaken identities, practical joking and drunken antics make for the substance of the revival. They are only intermittently enlivening or amusing. It is Miss Reid, as it was Helen Hayes in the last production of the comedy nine years ago, who succeeds in giving it a certain charm and eloquence. She is dashing and remarkably persuasive as the girl who pretends to be a boy. Hers is a lyric and romantic portrayal which saves "Twelfth Night" from being merely an example of Elizabethan humor at a very low common denominator.

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Reid's Sir Toby Belch is a robust characterization, but he is forced to engage in a great deal of slapstick pantomine to carry the scenes in which he and Sir Andrew Aguecheek almost drive the unfortunate Malvolio mad. Moss plays the pompous steward of Olivia with exaggerated emphasis, while Philip Tonge is not far behind him in overplaying the part of Sir Andrew. Unfortunately, there is too little fun in Shakespeare's random excursions into tippling and cruel jesting to make their efforts more than occasionally entertaining. Harry Townes fares better, on the whole, as the clown Feste, graceful on his feet and easy to listen to in the interpolated songs.

As Olivia Miss Foch is more comely than assured. Her performance of the melancholy lady who falls in love with Viola in a man's costume and fortunately discovers the girl's twin brother in the fantastic climax consists chiefly of posturing and a clear reading of her lines. That these are the least memorable in the comedy does not aid her in her assignment. Ruth Enders plays the accomplice of Sir Toby, Maria, vigorously, and Henry Brandon is forthright as the Duke of Illyria. Windt has kept his company moving briskly up and down a few steps, but like the music in the opening, "Twelfth Night" has a dying fall.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 4, 1949

# New 'Twelfth Night' Is Pleasing to Eye

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Since Shakespeare himself calls "Twelfth Night" an improbable fiction, an ideal production of it would never give the onlooker time to consider the likelihood of what goes on behind the footlights.

After all, dressing up like your twin brother or wearing yellow stockings are not uproarious jokes, but they can be funny if done in comical spirit. Certain virtues of such a mood would inevitably be freedom, assurance and pace.

The new production of the Elizabethan comedy is certainly a pretty one to look at. Nicely garbed and simply set with staggered curtains to vary the aspect, it is visually pleasant in an uncluttered Maxfield Parrish way.

**Energy, Style Lacking.**

What it lacks, though, is energy, gesture and style. Such patent nonsense as the plot here is gentle only at the cost of growing languid, then transparent, and finally tedious.

You may recall that Viola masquerades as a page and falls in love with her master while she is pressing his suit of Olivia. Olivia falls in love with the page, and marries his/her twin brother thinking he is the page. Orsino, one moment furious at being tricked, the next falls in love with Viola, which is highly convenient for a neat ending of this masque.

Since the play is 100 per cent artificial, it needs as much creative characterization and imaginative wit as can be visited on it. Shakespeare wrote a springboard, not a parachute.

**Vagaries of Direction.**

Certain vagaries of direction prove most distracting, as when the comics duck out of sight in frantic haste though Malvolio is looking in the opposite direction; or when Sir Andrew rushes directly toward Viola, completes a speech about his fear of her, and only then discovers she is there. The habit of lining three or four characters in a straight unyielding row throughout a scene is neither fluid nor gay.

Of the cast it seemed to us that Carl Benton Reid brought more conviction and understanding to his readings than anyone else. Frances Reid has exquisite flashes as a not consistently vivid Viola, and Nina Foch is so dazzling to watch that you may not remember a great deal about what she did.

Henry Brandon is virile and sympathetic as Orsino, no captivating character; and Walter Klavun has a forthrightness too rare in the company. As the fool, Harry Townes has distinct quality which needs tighter clenching to project effectively.

The Sun

OCTOBER 4, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE

*'Twelfth Night' in Routine Revival.*

Shakespeare was put to playing last night upon John Drew's sacred stage, bringing the shuttered Empire to life and giving a hesitant new season another start. It would be pleasant today to report that Roger Stevens's revival of "Twelfth Night" is one of the merriest within memory, but it isn't. Never actually irksome, but it never achieves any real distinction.

"Twelfth Night" is Shakespeare's chronicle of love and tomfoolery in Illyria—the poet's fable of rogues and knaves and rowdyism, of mistaken identity and a girl masquerading in boy's clothing, of the sweet Viola, the fair and imperious Olivia, the lovesick Orsino, and that outrageous creature of comical despair, Malvolio. To be more than intermittently effective as a theater piece, it's a play that calls for the performance that was given it in the Helen Hayes-Maurice Evans production, and in a lesser presentation, as it received last night, "Twelfth Night" is likely to be fairly overpowering with its pranks and its larks, its waggery and jocosity.

Some of the town's good actors, brushing up on their Shakespeare, come off creditably. The evening's best performance is that of Nina Foch. She is an enchanting Olivia—radiant in appearance, speaks the verse clearly, and is definitely a young woman who has improved as an actress since she made her attractive debut locally in "John Loves Mary." Frances Reid brings humor and spirit and zest into her characterization of Viola. Arnold Moss gets some comical effects into the swaggerings and lamentations of Malvolio, a tragi-comic figure out of the Elizabethan theater, fatuous and occasionally touching, funny when he is given to strutting and to the wooing of an incredulous Olivia but not at all when he is locked behind bars.

I didn't find the Sir Toby Belch of Carl Benton Reid uproarious, but let the observation be made, in fairness to a good actor, that the roistering Sir Toby was never more than a minor league Falstaff. Philip Tonge gets a measure of fun into the character of the outlandish Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Henry Brandon has a certain eloquence as the Duke of Illyria. The physical production at the Empire—setting and costumes by Louis Kennel—is good enough, with nice use made of platforms, lights and curtains. The direction of Valentine Windt keeps things moving fairly briskly.

This new presentation of "Twelfth Night" does not let you down particularly, but it seldom impresses you. Put it down as a routine revival of a Shakespearean comedy that fairly shrieks for the best acting in the land.

Journal American

OCTOBER 4, 1949

# Frances Reid Is Good But the Play Is Dull

By ROBERT GARLAND

If, dusting off your culture, you just have to see "Twelfth Night," the transplantation at the Empire serves quite as well as any. Some actors from Ann Arbor have come with the comedy to town. Under the sponsorship of Roger Stevens plus Michael Myerberg, it's less exhausting than expected.

Once each decade a leg-conscious leading lady decides to play Viola. On the century's turn it was Cissie Loftus at the Fifth Avenue. Ten years later, Annie Russell at the New. In 1920, Julia Marlowe at the Century. In 1930, Jane Cowl at the Maxine Elliott. In 1940, Helen Hayes at the St. James.

Before and between, Viola Allen, Sybil Thorndike (with the Ben Greeters), Margaret Anglin, Phyllis Neilson-Terry (whose props were "overwhelming"), Kathryn Collier, Beatrice Straight (in a stylized Chekhavian staging), Ada Rehan and Eva Le Gallienne tried their legs on the lady Illyrian...

Now, at the dear dusty Empire, it's Frances Reid.

* * *

From top to toe, Miss Reid's all right as William Shakespeare's girl-who-will-be-a-boy. As a matter of admiration, she and William Bromfield's Sebastian could change places. Her legs, as Viola's must be, are easy on the eye. Her voice, as Viola's should be, is easy on the ear. She's good. She's comely.

Arnold Moss gets more out of Malvolio than's in him. Not in my memory has the lengthy letter scene been as effectively projected. After three-and-a-half centuries, however, neither Olivia's steward nor his frustrations are as laughable as they must have been when first acted on the Thames-side.

As Feste, Harry Townes does everything he can with some of the sorriest of wisecracks. Even Malvolio, no master-mind himself, marvels that Olivia takes delight in such a barren funny fellow. But Mr. Townes, having announced that a witty fool is better than a foolish wit, makes his motley almost merry . . .

He sings, too! And draws a final curtain.

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In spite of Miss Reid, Mr. Moss and Mr. Townes, with such professionals as Nina Foch, who plays Olivia, Carl Benton Reid, who plays Sir Toby; Philip Tonge, who plays Andrew, and Henry Brandon, who plays Orsino, this "Twelfth Night" still retains its off-Broadway flavor. It remains contiguous to a campus!

Like a drama critic who goes in for acting, "Twelfth Night" is better read than heard. I've been sitting through it for many a year and, even as a youngster, I found it on the dull side. Then, of course, I didn't say so. Now, I do. Frankly, I don't care if I never see it again from last night on.

I'll say, however, that last night's is an improvement on the "Twelfth Night" I most remember. That was the 1940 putting-on. Then, not even Helen Hayes, Maurice Evans, June Walker, Anthony Ross, Wesley Addy, George Keane, Sophie Stewart, Philip Huston and Mark Smith could make is more than tolerable...

"Twelfth Night" is subtitled "What You Will." What I will is advise you to take it easy at the Empire if you take it any way at all.

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HOME NEWS

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# *The Bard of Avon In a Minor Mood*

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

There are at least a couple of dozen Shakespearean plays that I would rather have seen presented than "Twelfth Night," but it happens that it was "Twelfth Night" which was offered at the Empire Theatre last evening as the first dramatic offering of the belated new season. As a production, it has its points. It is by no means brilliant or exciting, but it is good-looking, well-spoken and offers several attractive, if not outstanding, performances. Arnold Moss is a good Malvolio, Nina Foch a radiant Olivia and Frances Reid a pleasant Viola, while Harry Townes sings the lovely songs of Feste admirably. These are real virtues.

As for the play itself, although it has become a cliche of modern Shakespearean presentation, it still undeniably has its glowing qualities. Those songs are delightful in their gentle air of melancholia. The familiar scenes of mistaken identity, with girls accepted as boys and nobody able to tell a brother from a sister, are more disarmingly managed in "Twelfth Night" than in most cases in Elizabethan comedy. There is about the play, too, an atmosphere of graceful romantic youth and charm that can be most engaging in its dewy freshness. It is the comedy which makes the play tedious and a little repulsive.

**Elizabethan Humor**

The world may not have progressed much in most ways, but in at least one respect there is a marked improvement in the modern taste. Apparently in Shakespeare's day there was something richly comic in the baiting of the pompous, fatuous Malvolio and real hilarity in the scene where the foolish Steward is dragged off to a madhouse and mocked by his tormenters. Today there is little fun in the practical joke played on Malvolio, and that episode where he is made sport of in the dungeon must certainly be the least funny scene in the history of dramatic literature. And there is assuredly a minimum of humor in the comics.

Feste, the clown, is bearable only when he sings, and the one thing that can be said in his defense is that apparently Shakespeare didn't think him very funny, either. Sir Andrew Aguecheek is one of the epic bores of all comedy, and Sir Toby Belch, the poor man's Falstaff, and a very poverty-stricken one at that, is at best but a pallid imitation of the superb comic figure of the immortal Sir John. That excellent actor, Carl Benton Reid offers rather a Middle-Western Sir Toby and, although he gives the bibulous knight considerable vitality, he cannot help a character that even W. C. Fields could hardly have made entertaining.

**Malvolio**

Malvolio is, of course, one of the most celebrated figures in all Shakespeare, and the role is an understandable temptation to all actors. Yet he is not a particularly happy creation in the theatre of today. He is not very comic any longer and the amount of sympathy which can be provided for him is rather limited, too. The poor fellow falls somewhere between the humorous and the tragic, and, while he is the only touching person in the play, he is not completely successful as either a clown or a figure of pathos. Mr. Moss is a fine actor and he can speak Shakespeare's lines with beauty and distinction, but he is not quite as impressive in his characterization as I had hoped.

As I have noted, Miss Foch is lovely as Olivia, who has difficulty telling a girl from a boy, and her playing has both warmth and charm. Miss Reid is helpful in a quiet way, and Philip Tonge as Aguecheek does as much with his impossible role as you might expect. The other performances at least have the virtue of being clear and audible. It takes a brilliant production to make "Twelfth Night" seem much more than a colorful charade these days, and the current presentation is not that. But it is a modestly pleasant version of one of the Bard's distinctly lesser flights.